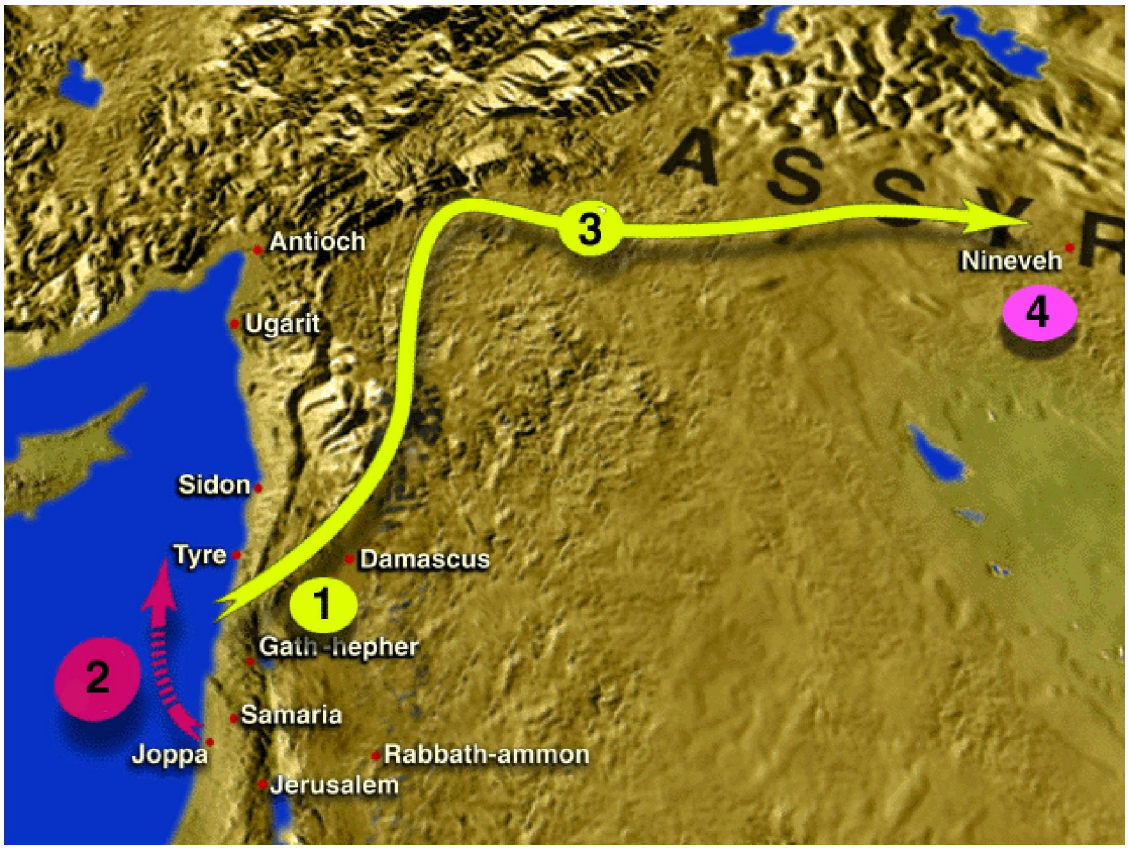
The Ministry of Jonah About the Time of Jeroboam II[1]



JONAH

INTRODUCTION

1. Title. The book is named after its principal character, Jonah, Heb. *Yonah*, which means "dove." *Yonah* is used as a term of endearment in S. of Sol. 2:14; 5:2; 6:9.

2. Authorship. Although the book itself nowhere states that Jonah was the author, the traditional view has been that he was. Many modern scholars have favored a postexilic authorship though not necessarily denying the historicity of Jonah. However, the arguments they advance, such as the presence of Aramaisms, are inconclusive. The study of Ugaritic has demonstrated the antiquity of many forms and words that were formerly held to belong to a much later date (see on Ps. 2:12; see Vol. III, pp. 618, 619). The use of the third person is likewise an insufficient argument, inasmuch as not a few ancient writers, such as Xenophon, Caesar, and others employed this method. Bible writers, too, at times used this method (Isa. 7:3; 20:2; Jer. 20:1, 3; 26:7; Dan. 1:6–11, 17, 19, 21; Dan. 2:14–20; etc.; see on Ezra 7:28).

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[1]Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment.* Commentary Reference Series (Jon 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

Jonah is identified as a native of Gath-hepher (2 Kings 14:25) who predicted prosperity for the nation of Israel. The prosperity was realized in the days of Jeroboam II (approximately 793–753 B.C.; see Vol. II, p. 83); so the prophecies must have been delivered either before or shortly after the beginning of Jeroboam II's reign. Gath-hepher was on the Zebulun border about 23/4 mi. (4.4 km.) north by east from Nazareth. It is *Khirbet ez–Zurrâ'*. A nearby tomb, claimed to be that of Jonah, is now exhibited. Nothing further is known concerning Jonah than what is revealed in this brief historical mention in 2 Kings, and in the book itself. Nor is anything known concerning his father, Amittai.

3. Historical Setting. The period in which Jonah prophesied was one of great national distress (2 Kings 14:26, 27). The kings who sat on Israel's throne all did evil in the sight of the Lord, and national judgment was approaching. Through Jonah the Lord predicted a return of national strength. It appears that the alleviation that followed was designed to be an inducement to the nation to return to God. The prosperity was a demonstration of what the nation might attain to under the blessing of the God of heaven. However, in spite of divine blessing Jeroboam "did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord" (2 Kings 14:24), as did his successors.

The kings in Assyria during the reign of Jeroboam II, according to the chronology employed in this commentary, were Adad-nirari III (810–782), Shalmaneser IV (782–772), Ashur-dan III (772–754), and Ashur-nirari V (754–746). There is evidence that possibly indicates that during the reign of Adad-nirari III a religious revolution occurred. Nabu (Nebo), the god of Borsippa, appears to have been proclaimed sole, or at least principal, god. Some see a possible connection between this monotheistic revolution and the mission of Jonah to Nineveh (see Vol. II, p. 60).

4. Theme. The book of Jonah is the only one of the twelve so-called Minor Prophets that is strictly narrative in form. It is an account of Jonah's mission to the city of Nineveh to announce its speedy destruction because of its sins. The prophet entertains misgivings and perplexities as to his carrying out the charge of God to go to Nineveh. The very thought of journeying to this great metropolis, the difficulties and seeming impossibilities of the task, made him shrink from undertaking the divine commission and question its wisdom. Failing to rise to that strong faith that should have led him to realize that with the divine command came the divine power to accomplish it, Jonah sank into discouragement, dread, and despair (see PK 266). Knowing the loving-kindness and long-suffering of God. Jonah was also afraid that if he delivered the divine message and the heathen accepted it, the threatening doom he pronounced upon them would not come to pass. This would be a deep humiliation to him, as it thus turned out to be, and this he could not endure (ch. 4:1, 2). He at first disobeyed, but through a series of events was led to carry out the commission. The inhabitants of Nineveh repented, and for a time turned from their sins. Jonah was angry, but God justified His gracious dealings.

Among the lessons taught by Jonah's prophecy is the truth that God's grace brings salvation to all (Titus 2:11), that it was indeed not confined to the Jews, but was also to be revealed among the heathen. God has "also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18). Like Peter (Acts 10), Jonah came to realize reluctantly that God was willing to receive those of every nation who turned to Him. By referring to "the men of Nineveh" who responded to Jonah's call to repentance, Jesus condemned the pharisaical and prideful Jews of His day (see Matt. 12:41; Luke 11:32) and all others who, in their

religious complacency and false sense of soul security, deceive themselves into thinking that they are the favored people of God, and thus assured of salvation.

Jesus used the experience of Jonah in the sea as an illustration of His death and resurrection (Matt. 12:39, 40). His reference to the book of Jonah establishes the veracity of the book.

Expositors of the book of Jonah have followed two main lines of interpretation: (1) the historical, and (2) the allegorical. The second method has been adopted by those who deny the possibility of the miraculous elements in the book. They term the book variously a legend, a myth, a parable, or an allegory. For one who believes in miracles the second method of interpretation is both unnecessary and pointless.

In favor of the historical view the following arguments have been presented:

1. The narrative leaves one with the impression that it is historical. There is no indication that the author intended it to be otherwise regarded.
2. Jonah was a historical character (2 Kings 14:25).
3. The Jews regarded the book as historical (Josephus *Antiquities* ix. 10. 1, 2).
4. The conversion of the Ninevites is plausible. See p. 996 for a possible historical synchronization with a religious revolution in Assyria.
5. The information as to the size of Nineveh can be harmonized with known historical facts (see Additional Note on Chapter 1).
6. The references of Jesus to the book (Matt. 12:39, 40; Luke 11:29, 30) show that our Lord regarded it as historical.

This commentary adopts the historical view.

5. Outline.

I. Jonah's Commission and Disobedience, 1:1:–17.
A. The prophet's refusal and the consequent storm, 1:1–10.
B. His being swallowed by the great fish, 1:11–17.
II. Jonah's Prayer and Deliverance, 2:1–10.
III. Jonah's Preaching and the Repentance of the Ninevites, 3:1–10.
IV. Jonah's Anger and God's Rebuke, 4:1–11.
A. The complaint, 4:1–5.
B. The withered plant and its lesson, 4:6–11.

CHAPTER 1

1 *Jonah, sent to Nineveh, fleeth to Tarshish*. 4 *He is bewrayed by a tempest*, 11 *thrown into the sea*, 17 *and swallowed by a fish*.

1. Jonah. On the identity of Jonah see p. 995.

Amittai. The name is derived from the Heb. *'emeth*, meaning "faithfulness," or "truth," Amittai is mentioned only here and in 2 Kings 14:25.

2. Their wickedness. Nahum designated Nineveh a "bloody city," "full of lies and robbery" (Nahum 3:1; cf. v. 19). Yet the city was not hopeless. It "was not wholly given over to evil" (PK 265).

Come up. This expression, or one similar to it, is used of the sins of the antediluvian world (Gen. 6:5, 11) and of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:20, 21). In both instances probation was about to close. Perhaps this was also now the case with Nineveh (see on Dan. 4:17).

Before me. Compare Gen. 18:20, 21. God keeps an account with the nations. Each has its period of test. God seeks to win the allegiance of all men and to secure the cooperation of the nations in carrying out the program of heaven.

3. Rose up. Jonah arose, not to obey God, but to disobey Him. Like the rich young ruler, he would not surrender his own will to the will of God (Matt. 19:21, 22). Like "many" of the Lord's "disciples," Jonah found God's command too "hard" to bear, and so, like them, he felt that in this instance at least he would not walk "with him" (John 6:60, 66). The prophet failed to realize that when God places a burden upon men to be discharged according to His pleasure, He strengthens them to bear it. With every divine command there comes the power to fulfill it. The prophet made the mistake of not putting "first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness" (see Matt. 6:33). Because he disliked the mission he was charged to undertake, he was willing to separate himself from God's service, thus putting himself in a position where, but for the divine intervening grace, he might have lost his soul.

Tarshish. It is generally agreed that Tarshish was the classical Tartessus on the southern coast of Spain. It was proverbial for its wealth, and carried on an extensive export trade with the Phoenician city of Tyre and other lands in silver, iron, tin, and lead (see Eze. 27:12). In that distant, busy place Jonah hoped to escape from his duty, and to still the voice of conscience.

From the presence. Literally, "from before the face of the Lord." How impossible an undertaking (see Ps. 139:7–12)!

To Joppa. The present-day Jaffa, on the sea about 34 mi. (54.4 km.) northwest of Jerusalem, and one of the world's oldest cities. It was the only harbor of any importance that belonged to the Jews. Through Joppa was brought to Jerusalem the timber for Solomon's Temple (see 2 Chron. 2:16), and also that for its restoration (see Ezra 3:7).

4. A great wind. The Lord did not forsake Jonah even though the prophet attempted to flee from Him. By a series of "trials and strange providences" He sought to effect a change in Jonah's attitude and conduct (see PK 266, 267).

Note the simple, natural agencies by means of which God accomplished His will—wind (ch. 1:4), a great fish (ch. 1:17), pain (ch. 2:10), a gourd (ch. 4:6), a worm (ch. 4:7), wind and sun (ch. 4:8).

Like to be broken. The sentence may be translated, "and the ship thought it would be broken." If this translation is adopted, there is here a vivid figure of personification.

5. Unto his god. The nationality and religion of the mariners are not identified. Some were probably Phoenicians, others possibly from various nations, thus representing a variety of religions.

Wares. Heb. *kelim*, "vessels," "receptacles," "equipment." It is not certain whether the cargo, as well as the tackle, was thrown overhead.

Sides. Heb. *yarkah*, "the back side," often used in the sense of the remotest part.

Fast asleep. Heb. *radam*, "to snore," "to be in a heavy sleep." The cause of Jonah's heavy sleep is not given.

6. Shipmaster. Literally, "chief sailor." The word for "sailor" comes from a root meaning "to bind," from which root the noun "rope" is derived. Though not stated, it is assumed that Jonah responded to the request.

7. Cast lots. The sailors felt that someone had provoked the anger of the gods. The Lord overruled in their method of determining who the culprit was, so that "the lot fell upon Jonah."

On the question of the right or wrong of casting lots see on Eze. 21:21.

8. Tell us. This series of short questions gives a vivid impression of the excitement on board that stricken vessel.

9. Hebrew. The name by which the Israelites were frequently designated by those not of their race (Gen. 39:14; 40:15; 41:12; Ex. 1:16; 2:7; 3:18; 1 Sam. 4:6). On the derivation of the name see on Gen. 14:13.

Lord. Heb. *Yahweh*, the personal name of God (see Vol. I, pp. 171, 172). The term "God" (Heb. *'Elohim*) is a generic name for deity, and "Lord" (Heb. *'Adonai*) is a title. The word *'elohim* is frequently used of false gods (Ex. 18:11; etc.). The name *Yahweh* thus peculiarly designates the true God.

God of heaven. See Gen. 24:7; Dan. 2:37, 44.

Which hath made. One of the distinguishing features set forth to show the superiority of the true God (Jer. 10:10–12).

Whether the sailors were familiar with the power of Jonah's God through a previous knowledge of Him (see Ex. 15:13–16; Joshua 5:1; 1 Sam. 4:5–9) we do not know. But, under the circumstances, being threatened with momentary death and doubtless interpreting the character of Jehovah by their own pagan concepts, they were terrified.

10. Why hast thou done this? An exclamation rather than a request for information.

11. What shall we do? Jonah was presumably the only one familiar with Jehovah and acquainted with the means by which to atone for the offense.

The sea wrought. The Hebrew idiom here employed shows that the tempest was increasing in fury.

12. Cast me forth. It is not clear whether Jonah here spoke by divine inspiration. At any rate his action was manly. He chose not to involve others in his ruin. Jonah was sadly lacking in moral courage (vs. 2, 3), but not in physical.

13. The men rowed hard. Perhaps some doubt existed as to whether Jonah's God required so extreme a measure.

To the land. It was the custom of ancient seagoing vessels to travel along the coast line; hence the ship was not far from land.

14. We beseech thee. The mariners were apprehensive lest they further offend Jehovah by putting one of His worshippers to death. Their prayers were directed, not to their gods, but to Jehovah.

15. The sea ceased. Compare Matt. 8:26. The calm came suddenly; therefore the sailors recognized it as an act of divine intervention.

16. Feared the Lord. So manifest was the Lord's power over nature in this episode and so striking had been the fulfillment of Jonah's words (v. 12), there is small wonder the sailors reacted as they did.

Offered a sacrifice. The men did what in their limited knowledge they though to be most appropriate.

17. Had prepared. Heb. *manah*, "to appoint." The word is thus translated in Dan. 1:5, 10.

A great fish. The record does not state whether the fish was created for the occasion or whether the Lord employed an existing variety capable of swallowing a man. Speculation on this point is valueless. The variety of fish is not identified. The Hebrew uses the generic term for "fish." In the NT reference to this experience in Matt. 12:40 the fish is designated by the Gr. *kētos*, "sea monster," though the KJV translates it "whale." The LXX reads *kētos* in Jonah 1:17.

Three days and three nights. The length of time involved in this expression has given rise to much discussion, inasmuch as Jesus declared: "For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:40). It can readily be demonstrated that according to Hebrew usage the expression does not necessarily mean three full days of 24 hours each, making 72 hours in all. For a discussion of the problem see on Matt. 12:40.

In the Hebrew and in the LXX, v. 17 is the first verse of ch. 2.

ADDITIONAL NOTE ON CHAPTER 1

One of the oldest of the Assyrian cities was Nineveh, the Assyrian *Ninua*. According to the Bible record it was founded by Nimrod (see on Gen. 10:11). Archeological evidence also attests its great antiquity. Several times in its history of many centuries Nineveh served as capital of the Assyrian kingdom. It reached its greatest importance during the empire period from the 9th to the 7th century B.C., especially during the reign of King Sennacherib, who made it the most glorious city of its time. From his descriptions of the general layout and the palaces of the city a clear picture of the ancient metropolis may be obtained. Since 612 B.C., when the Babylonians and the Medes thoroughly destroyed Nineveh, the city has lain in ruins. Even its location was forgotten until it was rediscovered in the middle of the 19th century (see Vol. I, p. 109).

Nineveh lay on the eastern bank of the Tigris River opposite the present-day city of Mosul. Anciently the river flowed along the city's western wall and thus formed an additional protection from that side. It has since changed its course, and now flows about 3/4 of a mile west of its old bed.

Two ruin mounds inside the area of Nineveh cover the principal palaces and temples of the ancient city. One of them is *Nebi Yunus*, under which Esarhaddon's palace is buried. The other mound, *Kuyunjik*, contains the ruins of the palaces of Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal. *Nebi Yunus* has scarcely been touched by the spade. A village stands upon this site as well as the traditional Moslem tomb of the prophet Jonah, which makes it impossible for the archeologist to disturb this mound. *Kuyunjik*, on the other hand, has seen several expeditions. Work on this mound was begun in 1840 by Botta. Parts of Sennacherib's and Ashurbanipal's palaces have since been uncovered. In Ashurbanipal's palace Layard and Rassam found a royal library of some 20,000 tablets, which is now one of the principal treasures of the British Museum. These texts revealed much concerning the history, culture, and religion of the ancient peoples of Mesopotamia.

The size of ancient Nineveh can be established rather accurately, because the city walls are still clearly visible even in their ruined state. In the form of drawn-out hills, interrupted by gaps where the gates were located, these walls can be seen from a great distance. Their combined length measures about 71/2 mi. (c. 12 km.), and the area of

1,640 acres (663.7 hectares) gives on the map the appearance of an irregular and elongated triangle (see p. 1002).

An octagonal clay prism of Sennacherib, who enlarged the city long after Jonah's time, describes the building activity of that king, and names 15 city gates, of which 7 were in the southern and eastern walls, 3 in the northern wall, and 5 in the western wall. During his excavations Henry Layard found one of the northern gates in a comparatively good state of preservation. The gate was flanked by colossal bulls, which he left in their original position. Visitors are still able to view them there. Two hills in the wall, covering watchtowers, reach a height of about 60 ft. (18.3 m.). The eastern wall, slightly bent, was about 3.2 mi. (5.1 km.) long, the western 2.7 mi. (4.3 km.), the northern 1.2 mi. (1.9 km.), and the southern .5 mi. (.8 km.). The wall, according to Sennacherib's description, was about 40 ft. (12.2 m.) thick and about 60 ft. (18.3 m.) high. From the east, Nineveh was protected not only by its walls but in addition by several embankments running parallel, whose remains are still visible.

Some have estimated the population of the walled city at 160,000. How many people may have lived outside the city is not known. Some writers have interpreted the reference in Jonah 4:11 to the 120,000 persons who could not discern between their right hand and their left, as applying to small children only. They have accordingly estimated the total population of Nineveh to have been from 600,000 to 2,000,000. Since such a large population could not have lived inside Nineveh, they have included in Jonah's Nineveh "Sargon's city," now called *Khorsabad*, 12 mi. (19.2 km.) north of Nineveh, and Calah, now *Nimrud*, south of Nineveh at the confluence of the Greater Zab and Tigris rivers. However, those cities, although belonging to Assyria, were separate units with their own protective walls and administrations, and are never included in Nineveh in the ancient historical records.

Consequently some modern commentators, who believe that the "sixscore thousand persons" of ch. 4:11 refers to only the children and that the writer refers only to Nineveh proper, regard the book as fictitious. In the light of the actual size of the city it may be best to interpret ch. 4:11 as referring to people who were unable to distinguish between right and wrong (see comments there). If 120,000 was meant as an approximation of the total population of the city proper, that would be a reasonable figure, compared to modern Mosul, only slightly larger until its expansion since World War I.

The statement made in ch. 3:3 that "Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey" probably means that it would take a man three days to cover its whole territory by going up and down its streets, if he wanted to reach all the people who lived within its walls.

Also the text stating that "Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried," of ch. 3:4, can hardly mean that he walked for a whole day until he reached a place in the city where he began his work of warning. This text may be understood as referring to the beginning of Jonah's work and to the proclamation of his message during the first day, the result of which was that "the people of Nineveh believed God" (ch. 3:5).

It should further be remembered that to a Palestinian Israelite, Nineveh was a city that could not be compared in size with any other city of Western Asia known to him. Samaria, the capital of the kingdom of Israel, covered only 19 acres (7.7 hectares), and no other city of Palestine was larger except Jerusalem (see Additional Note on Nehemiah 3).

For people coming from that country, Nineveh, which has been estimated at approximately 100 acres (40.5 hectares), was "an exceeding great city."

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1, 2 MH 473
1–3PK 266
4–8PK 267
9–17PK 268

CHAPTER 2

1 *The prayer of Jonah*. 10 *He is delivered from the fish*.

Tigris River Valley

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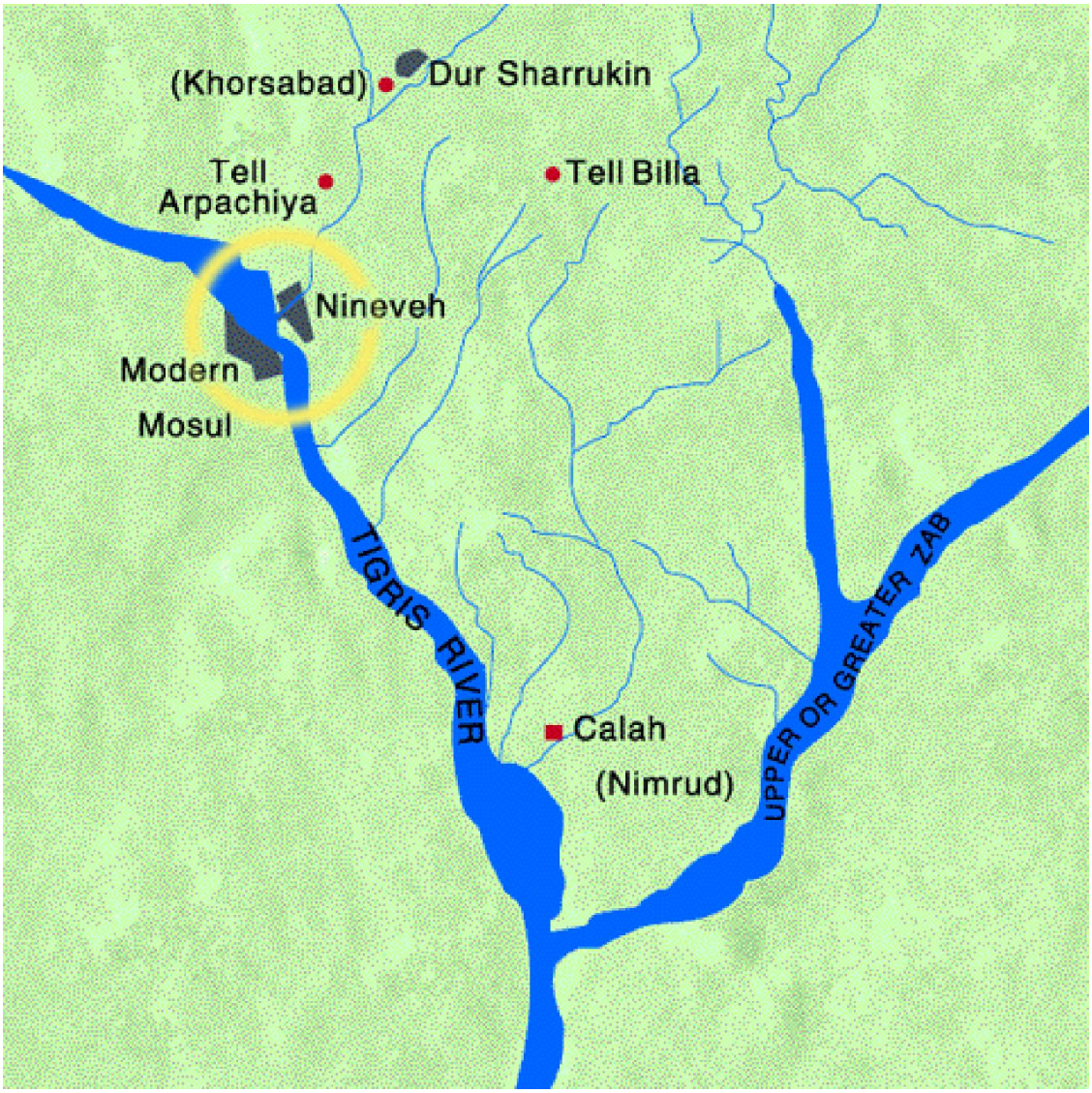
[2]Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment.* Commentary Reference Series (Jon 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.



1. Jonah prayed. The prayer describes the experience of Jonah while in the body of the fish. It acknowledges deliverance as an accomplished fact. The passages that speak of answered prayer and of deliverance are probably expressions of Jonah's strong faith in deliverance and of the divine assurance that may have been given him that his life was to be spared.

In Jonah's prayer there are allusions to certain psalms. Most modern scholars assign to these psalms a postexilic date; accordingly they have given a postexilic date to the book of Jonah. However, those who hold to a pre-exilic authorship of these psalms (see the introductions to the psalms concerned; also Vol. III, p. 617) find no difficulty in dating the book of Jonah in or before the time of Jeroboam II (see p. 995), when, according to 2 Kings 14:25, Jonah lived. The allusions show that Jonah, as a devout Israelite, was familiar with the wording of the psalms.

Whenever they are in need the children of God have the precious privilege of appealing to Him for help. It matters not how unsuitable the place may be, God's ear of

mercy is open to their cry. However desolate and dark the place may be, it can be turned into a veritable temple by the praying child of God.

2. By reason of mine affliction. Or, "out of my affliction." Compare the psalmist's cry (Ps. 18:6; 120:1). Like the prodigal son (Luke 15:17), Jonah, in his miserable and desperate condition, was brought "to himself," to the recognition of his utter helplessness, to his folly in rebelling against the will of God, and to his need of divine deliverance.

He heard me. Compare Ps. 50:15; 107:6.

Hell. Heb. *she'ol*, the figurative dwelling place of the dead (see on Prov. 15:11).

Thou heardest. See on v. 1.

3. Hadst cast. Or, "didst cast."

Into the deep. Jonah is giving a vivid poetic description of his harrowing experience.

Thy billows. Compare Ps. 42:7; 88:6, 7

4. I said. Compare Ps. 31:22.

Yet I will look. The LXX puts this in the form of a question, "Shall I indeed look again toward thy holy temple?" A change in vowel pointing yields the same reading in the Hebrew. The question seems preferable inasmuch as the context indicates that at this point hope had not yet established itself.

Toward thy holy temple. Compare 1 Kings 8:30; Ps. 18:6; 28:2; Dan. 6:10.

5. Soul. Heb. *nephesh*, here perhaps used in the sense of "life" (see on Ps. 16:10). That is, the waters compassed him almost to the point of taking his life (cf. Ps. 69:1, 2).

Weeds were wrapped. It is doubtful that the highly poetic language here should be interpreted so literally. Jonah is describing the fate of one consigned to the depths, and thus with dramatic vividness pictures him adorned with a turban of seaweeds.

6. The bottoms. Literally, "the cuttings off," probably meaning the foundations.

Earth. Heb. *'ereṣ*, which is translated "land" more often than "earth." Jonah may here be designating the land of *she'ol* (see on v. 2), which closes its bars around those who enter there. To him it appeared that he would be there "for ever." This does not imply that Jonah did not believe in a future resurrection. The word here translated "for ever," *le'olam*, denotes time extended into the indefinite future. Sometimes it means eternity; at other times the duration is limited by circumstances (see on Ex. 21:6). The LXX attaches *le'olam* to "bars," "I went down into the earth, whose bars are the everlasting barriers."

Corruption. Heb. *shachath*, "pit," often used synonymously with *she'ol* to represent the realm of the dead (see on Prov. 15:11).

8. Lying vanities. Jonah contrasts his happy experience with the fate of those who worship idols (see Ps. 31:6).

Mercy. Heb. *chesed* (see Additional Note on Psalm 36). According to some, Jonah refers to the one true God Himself; according to others, he refers to God's works of goodness and loving-kindness, which He reveals to all men (see Ps. 145:8, 9; Isa. 55:3; Acts 14:15–17).

9. Sacrifice. See Ps. 50:14; Eccl. 5:4, 5.

Salvation. Compare Ps. 3:8; Rev. 7:10.

10. Spake. God is in control of the creatures He has made. The knowledge of this fundamental fact fortifies against false theories of God, which either make Him subject to

natural law or make Him an inseparable, inescapable part of nature itself. The scriptural conception of God is that He is nature's Creator, the One who, apart from it, directs and sustains the universe, the One who is over all things (see Job 38; 39; Ps. 19; Col. 1:12–17; Rev. 14:7).

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1, 2 PK 268
3–9PK 269

CHAPTER 3

1 *Jonah, sent again, preacheth to the Ninevites*. 5 *Upon their repentance*, 10 *God repenteth*.

1. The second time. Without rebuke for Jonah's earlier defection the Lord repeats the commission to preach to the Ninevites. Yielding no more to human inclination, Jonah renders prompt obedience to the heavenly call, and without further delay sets out for Nineveh.

2. Arise, go. Because of the repetition of these words (see ch. 1:2) some Bible scholars believe it is likely that when Jonah was delivered from the "great fish" he went to Jerusalem to "sacrifice" and pay the vows alluded to in his prayer of thanksgiving (ch. 2:9). This is pure conjecture.

In ancient times a ship going from Joppa to Tarshish would probably follow the coast line of Palestine northward. If the incident with the whale occurred early in the voyage, Jonah may have found himself much closer to Nineveh than when he embarked (see on ch. 1:13; see The Ministry of Jonah).

Preach. Heb. *qara'*, the word translated "cry" in ch. 1:2.

That I bid thee. The charge to Jonah is that given to every preacher of the word. Only the word of God is to be proclaimed from the pulpit, and not the word of man (see 2 Tim. 4:1, 2). Anxious and perplexed souls in our troubled world today long to receive the counsel of God and not the uncertain and vain reasonings and philosophies of men fallible like themselves. They prefer a "Thus saith the Lord" to a "Thus saith a man."

3. Jonah arose. The prophet was now as ready to carry out the commission given him by God as formerly he was prompt to avoid it.

Exceeding. Heb. *le'lohim*, literally, "for God," an idiomatic way of designating extreme greatness. On the size of the city see Additional Note on Chapter 1.

4. A day's journey. We need not infer from this statement that Jonah walked for an entire day before beginning his preaching. The statement is probably a record of the first day's preaching. Soon after entering the city Jonah doubtless began his message of warning.

Yet forty days. It need not be assumed that these words constituted the entire text of Jonah's message. They were, however, the dominant theme of his warning.

Overthrown. Heb. *haphak*, the word used in Gen. 19:21, 25, 29 to describe the destruction of Sodom.

5. Believed God. Or, "believed in God." On the possible background, interpreted by some as contributing to the success of Jonah's preaching, see pp. 995, 996.

Sackcloth. A coarse dark material woven from goat's hair and worn in times of mourning and calamity (see Dan. 9:3; Matt. 11:21; Luke 10:13).

6. The king. Possibly Adad-nirari III (see p. 996). The feeling of contrition and repentance seems to have sprung spontaneously from the people without any official royal command (v. 5). It is a remarkable spectacle to see a king of the mightiest empire of his day humbling himself "in ashes" as a result of the preaching of a foreign prophet. What a rebuke to Israel's proud rulers and people, who persistently refused to humble their hearts under the impact of an even more extensive and continuous prophetic ministry (see 2 Kings 17:7–18)!

7. Proclaimed. When the wave of penitence and humility that began with the people reached the king, he confirmed the fasting by an official decree. His nobles were associated with him in the issuing of this decree, indicating that their spirit was akin to his in this crisis.

Nor beast. A strange decree, but we must remember that it was issued by a heathen king who had been but partially enlightened. A similar custom is referred to in the Apocryphal book of Judith, written probably in the 2d century B.C.: "And every man of Israel cried to God with great intensity, they and their wives and their children and their cattle and every stranger and hired servant and their slaves put on sackcloth upon their lions" (Judith 4:9, 10). Herodotus reports that on one occasion the Persians cut off their own hair and the hair (manes and tails?) of their horses and beasts of burden in a time of general mourning (ix. 24). But to what extent these practices may have reflected the Assyrian customs we do not know.

8. Let them turn. That is, the men. Outward religious acts are without spiritual value unless accompanied by sincere, inner reformation of character.

Violence. Compare Amos 3:10.

9. Who can tell? It is doubtful that Jonah had given any assurance of a possible reversal of the divine decree. His anger at the sparing of the city (ch. 4:1) indicates that he had not. Nevertheless he was well aware of God's merciful character (ch. 4:2).

10. They turned. Compare Matt. 12:41; see PK 363.

God repented. God does not change, but circumstances do (see Jer. 18:7–10; Eze. 33:13–16). His pronouncements of judgments are frequently, in effect, conditional prophecies (see on Eze. 25:1). For a discussion of the manner of God's repenting see on Gen. 6:6; 1 Sam. 15:11. God speaks to men in terms of their own experience.

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1, 2 PK 269
1–5 PK 339, 363
3 PK 265
3–9 PK 270
3–10 LS 62
4 1T 56
9 5T 78
10 PK 271; PP 97

CHAPTER 4

1 *Jonah, repining at God's mercy*, 4 *is reproved by the type of a gourd*.

1. Displeased. The first clause reads literally, "It was evil unto Jonah, a great evil." Chapter 4 displays a striking contrast between the impatience of the human heart and the long-suffering of God. Jonah was more than displeased; he was highly indignant that "God repented of the evil" (ch. 3:10). Instead of rejoicing that God's grace had forgiven

the penitent Ninevites, he allowed his selfish and sinful pride to make him resentful. Because what he predicted did not come to pass, he felt he would be regarded as a false prophet. Reputation was to him of more value than all the souls in the Assyrian capital. He may also have reasoned that the Lord's knowledge of the future would be discredited among the heathen because of this unfulfilled prophecy.

Very angry. The mercy of God toward the Ninevites (ch. 3:10) enraged Jonah. Divine mercy had spared his own life when he was disobedient, but he was jealous when God extended the same mercy toward others.

2. He prayed. How different the circumstances of this prayer, compared with that of ch. 2, and how different the spirit that prompted it! There he prayed for life; here, for death. There he was humble; here, he is angry.

3. Take … my life. How different is Jonah's appeal to God from that of Moses, who, in the true spirit of self-sacrifice, was willing to have his name blotted out that his offending people might live (see Ex. 32:31, 32). Jonah gave way to complete discouragement.

4. Angry. Jonah's anger was generated wholly by selfishness, not by a noble indignation such as prompted Jesus to drive out the money-changers from the Temple (see John 2:13–17). By his hasty spirit the prophet robbed himself of a great blessing (see Prov. 14:29; 16:32).

5. Till he might see. Some have suggested that Jonah interpreted the question, "Doest thou well to be angry?" (v. 4), as implying that in his haste he had misjudged the divine intention, and therefore there was still the possibility that Nineveh might be destroyed; others, that Jonah may have felt the repentance of the people of Nineveh was not sincere, and God would punish them after all. It may rather be that his reaction merely reflected his stubborn attitude and insistence that God perform that which He had threatened.

6. Prepared. Heb. *manah*, "to appoint."

Gourd. Heb. *qiqayon*, an unknown plant. Various identifications have been proposed, such as the castor oil plant, a variety of cucumber, etc. The plant grew up miraculously, and it is unnecessary to identify it with any known rapidly growing plant, though it may have been a variety well known in those regions, probably the unidentified *kukkānītu* of the Akkadian.

Grief. Heb. *ra'ah*, a general word representing evil, misfortune, trouble, misery. Jonah's discomfort was not so much physical as it was mental and spiritual, owing to the vexation, humiliation, and disappointment that he felt he was suffering.

7. Prepared. See on v. 6.

It withered. How often it is true in human experience that when a new day of joy and gladness seems about to begin, some worm of misfortune or sorrow comes along to turn hope into despair.

8. Prepared. See on v. 6.

Vehement. Heb. *charishith*, a word occurring only here and perhaps meaning "scorching." The RSV offers the suggestion "sultry."

9. I do well. The prophet impatiently and stubbornly defended his anger and resolution to die. God was seeking to stimulate within him a reasonable attitude.

10. Thou hast had pity. The "thou" is emphatic in the Hebrew. Jonah, the angry and unsympathetic prophet, was willing to show pity and spare an inconsequential gourd of little value, and upon which he had expended no labor or toil, but was unwilling to show the same consideration to the people of the great city of Nineveh. The LXX renders the first part of the verse, "And the Lord said, Thou hadst pity on the gourd, for which thou hast not suffered, neither didst thou rear it."

Jonah was angry that God would not destroy the Ninevites (vs. 1, 4), and angry when God permitted the gourd to wither (v. 9). What a distorted sense of values! Jonah cared more for the gourd than for the people of Nineveh.

11. Spare. Heb. *chus*, "to be sorry for," "to show compassion for." *Chus* is translated "hast had pity" in v. 10.

Sixscore thousand. On the population of Nineveh see Additional Note on Chapter 1.

That cannot discern. Some have applied this expression to the young children who were not yet old enough to determine which hand was the stronger and more useful. If it is assumed that these young children comprised one fifth of the population, Nineveh would have been a city of about 600,000. This figure is impossibly large and cannot be reconciled with the known size of the ancient city. It seems better to regard the expression, "that cannot discern," as metaphorical, designating those who possessed an imperfect knowledge of good and evil. If the expression is to be regarded as literal, then Nineveh with its surroundings was intended (see Additional Note on Chapter 1).

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1, 2 LS 78
1–3PK 271
2 SC 10; 5T 649
4–11PK 272
[3]

[3]Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment.* Commentary Reference Series (Jon 2:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.